

## FOREWORD

I think most of us would say that we could think of no better place to live than Harkstead. It boasts no mountain skyline or pounding surf, but we can walk the lanes under a vast East Anglian sky, watch the sun set over the river, listen to the geese in flight, see the stars at night, and smell the autumn leaves. We are not imprisoned by tower blocks or deafened by traffic, choked by fumes or drenched in artificial light. We can see and hear and breathe the English countryside. We are very blessed.

And one of our dearest wishes is that you, the reader of this book in years to come, will experience the same wonders and feel the same joy and the same love for this place.

People seldom pass through here on their way to somewhere else. We are off the beaten track, unknown, unadvertised, untroubled. In years gone by roads ran southwards across the peninsula to quays on the Stour shore linking Suffolk to London by water, but the railway and the motorway have taken over and the peninsula is once again a bystander watching trucks stream across the Orwell Bridge and freighters and ferries sail in and out of Felixstowe and Harwich.

We draw our inspiration from these quiet fields and woods and estuaries, but we also give our energies to the world beyond the Strand and Cutlers Wood and Alton Water. A car drive into Ipswich or a train journey into London takes us into a world of finance or manufacture, local government or education, health care or communications. Many of us go to school or college. We plunge daily into these activities and retreat thankfully each evening to this haven of peace.

But, of course, not everyone departs to work each day, and although the village is peaceful it is also a place of activity. We pride ourselves on being a community of people, a nucleus with a life of its own, a place where neighbours are companions. Like any community we have our stresses and strains, our joys and sorrows, our celebrations and tragedies. Not all of this will be revealed to you; some is too personal or too painful; but you will discover much of the detail of our lives - our occupations and our institutions, our strengths and our weaknesses - as you turn the pages of this book.

We hope you enjoy reading it. We shall certainly have enjoyed writing it.

**Rodney Freeman** January 2000